

Scenic and Recreational Highways Plan Questions and Answers

January 2010

What is the purpose of the Scenic and Recreational Highways Plan?

Our purpose is to develop guiding principles (goals, objectives and performance measures) that will establish a framework for WSDOT's program and guide our ranking of National Scenic Byway Grants for FHWA.

This Plan is a new stand alone document and an element of Washington's Highway System Plan that establishes goals and performance measures consistent with the state's transportation policy goals (RCW 47.04.280), and

- Provides guidance to WSDOT programs
- Informs other planning efforts such as the Washington Transportation Plan
- Provides heightened awareness of the value of the state scenic system
- Fulfills the need to include a Scenic and Recreational component to the Multi-Modal Transportation Plan as required by state law (RCW 47.06).

Is this Plan an update to an existing Plan or is it a new document?

This Plan is a new stand alone document and an element of Washington's Highway System Plan. Past Highway System Plans have addressed Scenic and Recreational Highways, but not to the extent that this new Plan will.

What is the difference between Scenic and Recreational Highways and Scenic Byways – as shown on the Map?

The map of Scenic and Recreational Highways is a map of the content of RCW 47.39. Scenic and Recreational Highways Act and the Scenic Byways are also mapped, but no legal reference (Mile Post X to Miles Post Y or named byways) exists for these routes. This does not mean that they are less valuable. In 1999, WSDOT published a map of scenic byways in paper copy and more recently on our website per RCW 47.39.060 at:

http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/NR/rdonlyres/24187DE9-0785-4A13-B013-41DE5A130B5F/0/ScenicBywaysMap_small.pdf

Will this plan affect the Scenic Byways and/or the function of the National Scenic Byways Program?

This plan will not change the National Scenic Byway Program itself. WSDOT's role is to administer the National Scenic Byway Program by providing technical assistance, coordination and support to the scenic byways, evaluate and rank grant proposals and work with the byway project sponsors to ensure that the funded Scenic Byway Projects are implemented according to Federal Rules and Regulations.

The Plan is anticipated to establish guiding principles (goals, objectives, performance measures) that will help WSDOT administer the National Scenic Byway Program. At this time we do not know what the specific criteria will be for ranking federal Scenic Byway Grants for FHWA. Generally speaking however, we expect the ranking process and criteria will be consistent with the Scenic and Recreational Highways Plan.

Consistent with other grant processes we administer, we will ask stakeholder agencies and organizations who do not have a potential conflict of interest or plan to apply for funding through the grant program to help us further develop the ranking criteria. We will post all criteria and guidelines to the website and issue a press release when the grant program becomes available.

Does WSDOT intend to change or alter the current status or management of the Scenic Byways?

Assuming this means WSDOT's program administration – Yes. The extent to which it will be changed will be determined by the Plan. We expect to create a more transparent grant review process that is consistent with the goals in the Plan.

Does WSDOT intend to change the status of corridor management plans (CMP's) from informal documents to regulatory document?

No.

Will WSDOT base Scenic Byway grant review criteria and funding recommendations on byway corridor management plans (CMP's)?

The State Plan will establish goals, objectives, strategies, and performance measures that we will use to help establish grant review criteria. The Plan includes consideration of the content of CMPs. In developing Background Paper #2, each CMP was reviewed. Existing CMP goals, project needs and any performance measures were compiled and considered in development of the first DRAFT Plan.

Does WSDOT intend to prioritize Scenic Byway projects and funding based on its own agency's project priorities and/or on other state agency project priorities?

FHWA determines which projects are funded for the National Scenic Byway Grant program. FHWA asks WSDOT to review and rank applications. WSDOT is developing a Scenic and Recreational Highways Plan that will establish guiding principles for WSDOT programs and help us in ranking these grant applications.

Does WSDOT intend to seek de-designation of any highway within the scenic system associated with a state recognized Scenic Byway, including segmented byways?

No. This plan is not an effort to remove or de-designate popular scenic routes.

Designation and de-designation of Scenic and Recreational Highways is under the jurisdiction of the state legislature. WSDOT has not proposed the de-designation of any routes.

Will WSDOT support de-designation of any highway association with a Scenic Byway including segmented byways for the purpose of Billboard placement?

WSDOT has not proposed the de-designation of any routes. Designation and de-designation of Scenic and Recreational Highways is under the jurisdiction of the state legislature. Generally speaking, when WSDOT reviews proposed legislation, we follow a standardized process that evaluates fiscal and other impacts to the agency. Typically, in this process, WSDOT is asked if changes being proposed by the state legislature would have an impact on the agency.

Regarding the project list in Appendix A, are local byway groups held to this list?

No. The list of projects that is being compiled as part of the DRAFT Plan is intended to raise awareness about these projects and initiate more discussion to ensure that funded projects are delivered faster with fewer challenges. The list will be “rolling” or updated as we receive new information and published as part of Plan updates in the future – similar to the Highway System Plan projects. Local byway groups are encouraged to submit unfunded projects for this list.

Will the plan change the way local byway groups do Corridor Management Plans (CMPs)?

The State Plan will not change the requirements for CMPs funded through the National Scenic Byway Grants. There is increased awareness that the CMPs are not currently being incorporated into the broader planning framework in Washington. Any changes to CMPs would have to be directed by the federal government or state legislature. WSDOT has not proposed any changes to either.

What kind of outreach has been done to ensure everyone knows to submit their projects?

Outreach to Steering Committee agencies and organizations, Local Byway Groups, local agencies, RTPOs. Outreach through 7 public meetings around the state, televised briefing of Washington Transportation Commission, statewide press releases, website, email, conference calls. The draft project list is included as an appendix in the draft Plan currently out for review. We hope people will comment if they know of projects that are missing.

What is the timeline when Scenic and Recreational Routes were added to the State law?

This information is contained in RCW 47.39. .

Will there be another Steering committee meeting?

The next Steering Committee Meeting is Feb. 16th. All the information will be made available on our website at:

<http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/LocalPrograms/ScenicByways/BywaysPlan.htm>

How were the goal statements in the first Draft Plan developed?

WSDOT developed two background papers and solicited public comments on both. This information was used to shape the goal statements included in the first DRAFT Plan along with other input and information including:

- Feedback from the Steering Committee, including the comments from Betsy Grable and Bonnie Lippit.
- A review of historic project funding information
- A review of unfunded project needs
- Content of the Corridor Management Plans written by local byway groups
- University of Washington's Study titled, "Resource Planning Index Report"

Comments are now being accepted on the goal statements and other information in the first DRAFT.

Is the first DRAFT Plan in conflict or inconsistent with US Code or federal guidance related to Scenic and Recreational Highways?

No. FHWA is represented on the Steering Committee for this Plan and WSDOT has been consulting with the lead staff for the National Scenic Byway Program. Both have indicated that there is not conflict with US Code or federal regulations. WSDOT will continue to coordinate with FHWA throughout the development of the Plan to ensure it is consistent with federal direction.

In an attempt to make it clear that WSDOT is developing a state plan for Scenic and Recreational Highways, the background papers, documents, and the first DRAFT Plan do not spend time discussing the National Scenic Byway Program administered by FHWA, other than to say that the National Scenic Byway Grants are important and will continue to be important to Washington to help us implement our state Plan and reach our goals. We do not intend to include discussion about the National Scenic Byway Program. There is a lot of good information available about that program through FHWA. We believe it would only be duplicative and add to confusion to include a discussion about how Washington's Plan for Scenic and Recreational Highways is consistent with US code or federal guidance.

What is the Resource Planning Index and will it be used to prioritize one byway over another?

The Steering Committee defined three primary elements of importance related to the Plan and the Scenic and Recreational Highways including: *Tourism/Traveler Services, Planning and Integration, and Stewardship* (not in any order). The Steering Committee did not prioritize these areas, but generally feels they are all important to address. As part of Background Paper #2, WSDOT reviewed performance measures currently being collected and other information currently available for all three of these elements. Some information and measures are available for *Tourism/Traveler Services*, some information is available for *Planning and Integration*. The least measurable information was available for *Stewardship*. There was also confusion about what was meant by

Stewardship. The University of Washington conducted a study as part of the developing the Plan. The study is titled, “Resource Planning Index Report”

This study defines stewardship and takes a first step at developing a concept for measuring performance associated with this one element. The definition used in the study is: “protecting, preserving, and enhancing resources associated with the state Scenic and Recreational Highways.”

These resources may be scenic (e.g., view shed), environmental (e.g. ecosystems, water quality, or wildlife habitats), or historic (e.g, historic locations).

The University of Washington study “Resource Planning Index Report” is available on WSDOT’s website at:

http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/NR/rdonlyres/4D395704-D7F4-4C4E-AED8-9A098835460E/0/RP_Index_FinalDraft.pdf

Why does the first Draft Plan for Scenic and Recreational Highways include unfunded projects?

We have asked for unfunded project needs to determine how much unmet need exists and what types of need exist. This is an effort to raise awareness and increase coordination related to these projects. This is not an attempt to prioritize these projects. It is another way to raise awareness about these needs. All the projects we receive will be considered unmet needs.